

SLEEK

Helmut Lang: I Express What Is Important To Me



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As one of the most influential fashion designers of the 90s, Helmut Lang has always been a man of vision and his thinking follows a strongly utilitarian approach. In 2005, Helmut Lang left the eponymous brand he had founded and devoted himself to his artistic work with sculptures. In his work, he incorporates physical movements and states outside the boundary of the human body. Though difficult to do, Sleek has selected three of the most significant solo exhibitions from the complete oeuvre of Helmut Lang.

Alles Gleich Schwer (roughly translated to mean everything has equal weight) was his debut solo exhibition and the first one to demonstrate the constant evolution within his creative process. With

Installation view, Helmut Lang, *Alles Gleich Schwer*, kestnergesellschaft, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

this series, Lang created objects and sculptures that explore the intersection between personal and shared mythological records of public and private experiences. Lang himself said:

“The continuity is that I’m expressing what’s important to me with the appropriate form, content, and context through different mediums and other dimensions.”

Continuity expresses what matters with regard to the appropriate form, content, and background through a variety of dimensional possibilities. The works on display tell a story of inner and outer identity and the exploration of space, in an attempt to connect abstract arrangements of the world as a whole.



For *new work*, which was exhibited in New York, Lang worked with objects he simply found lying around, as well as readily available materials to create a raw and mysterious body of work. Lang’s artwork is process-oriented with visible echoes of his experimental approach. His works capture the intense physicality of body and mind. New groups of works seemed to emerge: floating, tangled floor sculptures and memory foam wall reliefs suggesting personal vulnerability. There is also the eternal dynamic of opposing forces that we as a species strive to reconcile: abstraction and figuration, physical presence and absence, and even more painful: amputated or erased memories.

His wall reliefs of foam speak of a threshold between attraction and the reality of failure, negotiating an understanding between different tissues and textures of the body. Hanging sculptures made of shellac paper evoke anthropomorphic presence and erotic emotions. At the same time, one is confronted with a kind of cruelty and somber metamorphosis by the figures suspended from

industrial hooks, twisted shells, and shedded skins. A final series of surrogate-skin-like wall reliefs in silk, oil, and shellac pays tribute to Lang's rare and provocative image landscape.

For his two-part exhibition *Various Conditions*, which took place in Vienna and Zurndorf, Lang created spatial concepts of a dualistic black and white universe. The white part of the space prompts a contemplative silence by way of relief-like wall panels and whitewashed phallic sculptures. In contrast, the dark cladding of the walls and arrow-shaped black sculptures embody the predominantly black urban space. Between figuration and abstraction, Lang worked with forms of classical sculpture (wall reliefs, individual sculptures) and ritualistic objects (idols), which he artistically deconstructs, abstracts, and transforms.



A radical reduction of form and color, a decontextualization, the connection of sculptures and spatial design, and the use of readily available materials and waste characterize his work. For Lang, everything is material and is treated equally, but he is particularly attracted to material “with a certain history, elements with an irreplaceable presence and with scars and memories of a former purpose.” Helmut Lang makes the intangible and transcendent perceivable, evoking a sense of restlessness and calm, struggle and arrival, as is fitting for evolutionary leaps. If you'd like to learn more about the artist and what he's currently working on, you can check out the latest and upcoming exhibitions listed on his studio page. Furthermore, you can have a look at our interview with Helmut Lang in the current issue of *SLEEK magazine: The Courage Issue*